

Neither Man Nor Woman

Maya Posch, 27, believes that she is intersexual, with physically both male and female characteristics. How she deals with this – and what it means for love.

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Photo: Sasha Lambert

In the midst of power drills, wall paper, and paint buckets, Maya discovered her true identity. 2005, in a "Do-it-yourself" shop. She was 21 years old at the time. She also realized for the first time her feminine mannerisms. Her gait. The way she brushes her hair to the side. That she tries to catch the attention of men. There, in between the shelves in the bright fluorescent light. That night, she cried herself to sleep. And mostly through the next day, as well. She was shocked. Irritated. But also relieved and overjoyed. She finally decided – for her feminine side. Officially, Maya lived until this day as a man by the name of Thijs; at least officially. On the inside, though, things were different. Quite literally different.

Maya: copper hair, ivory skin, delicate fingers and a weightless handshake. She lives in Almere, a dull town-house-suburb of Amsterdam in a tiny, 12-square meter room with pink walls. Make-up mirror, lip gloss and creme tins stand beside computer processors, a tool box and screws beside "Hello-Kitty" stuffed animals. ("I love cats!") Maya runs from here a small software business, she develops video games and creates avatars. But she herself has more astonishing features than the figures which she creates. Because she says: "I'm an intersexual woman." About one in about 2000 newborns is born intersexual, meaning it is genetically, anatomically, and hormonally neither masculine nor feminine. After her epiphany in the home-improvement store, she thought, "Wow, officially I'm a guy. And obviously I would rather be a girl. So that must mean that I'm transsexual." She looked for answers on the internet, and stumbled upon a site about intersexuality. She looked in the mirror, she had hips, no Adam's apple. She even had small breasts and womanly figure. But, she also had a beard and a penis. With which she did not experience pleasure, as it was only anatomically "normal". Was she intersexual? A hermaphrodite? Did she have other hidden female traits? In a Dutch clinic, the doctors said: No. As a result, Maya underwent an MRI at a German private clinic and received surprising results: she had a vagina. This had no outside opening, so it was therefore invisible from the outside. This was confirmed by a second opinion. Back in Holland, however, the doctors saw nothing "out of the ordinary". Even today, Maya isn't sure about "what's down there". A thorough chromosome test should soon shed some light on the matter.

"Until the age of five, I was a happy child. But then came the age when boys start not liking girls, and girls not liking boys. But I didn't know quite to which side I belonged. So I stayed between the two. Alone." While her classmates began discovering their bodies during puberty, Maya hid behind her books and in front of her computer. At that time she had no friends. She was bullied in school – "until she beat up the ring leader". She didn't know what was wrong with her. Only that the boys' clothes which her mother brought for her didn't fit – because of her feminine figure, which she at the time didn't notice. That the school photographer said "all the girls to the front", a comment which was obviously also directed at her. Or that once the toilet lady forbade her to enter the men's toilet, and sent her to the ladies'. After which she left the shop confused. Now, after the fact, it all makes sense. "When I looked in the mirror, I didn't see a boy. Nor did I see a girl. Just a gender-neutral creature." Until that day in the home-improvement store. Today, no one doubts at all that Maya is a woman. Not even when she goes swimming in a bikini. She just places her penis towards the back, that way no one sees anything. That is not the problem, she says. The battles lie elsewhere. Unlike her mother and two brothers, her father could not accept this fact at all. She is no longer in contact with him – her parents are separated. "He just doesn't understand me at all. I don't need these sort of people in my life." And what about a relationship? To which gender is she more

attracted? "I like getting attention from men. But even more from women. To be quite honest, I never had a real relationship. Just recently I went on my first date; with a bisexual woman." When Maya speaks about love, she suddenly looks helpless and overwhelmed. She arranges her hair to one side, and swings it over her shoulder towards her back. As if this one gesture could erase everything. All of those thoughts about things which were denied to her until now: love, relationships, sex. All things with which she is constantly confronted, in books, in movies, in songs. In conversations with her friends.

When Maya meets new people, she is open about her sexual traits. She also told her first date, whom she met on the internet, even before they first met. "Why shouldn't I talk about it? It's part of me, and all the reactions are positive, full of empathy." Even when someone can't really understand how it is to have to fit themselves into some niche where they really don't belong. No matter whether it means filling out a form, going to the public toilets, or choosing which dressing rooms to use in the department store.

Maya has been taking oestrogen and a testosterone-blocker since 2007. She only needs the latter until her testicles are removed. If in fact she has a vagina, she wants to have it opened. And, yes, she wishes to keep her penis. In the end this is part of her. "I know I'm not a normal woman, but I also know that I'm not a man. I just am how I am. I'm a woman with a little something extra."

She chose the name Maya herself. In Hinduism, Maya is the goddess of illusion. A creature which appears to be something different at first glance than what she really is. She could hardly have made a better choice.

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